

N E W S R E L E A S E

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Date: July 30, 2008

News Release No.: 08-28

Fifty-three High School Students With Disabilities Participate In Statewide Leadership Forum

SACRAMENTO – Fifty-three extraordinary high school students from throughout California gathered today on the West Steps of the State Capitol as part of an innovative five-day forum designed to help young people with disabilities reach their full potential. Each student was selected to attend the Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) for Students with Disabilities based on their individual achievements and leadership qualities.

“The young people who are participating in the forum are setting an example for all of us,” said Patrick Henning, director of the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency’s Employment Development Department (EDD). “Their determination to live full and productive lives in the face of often severe disabilities should encourage and motivate all of us to follow their example in our own lives. Their refusal to be pigeonholed as ‘disabled’ challenges us to accept all people on the basis of their abilities, not their disabilities.”

The delegates began the morning with a rally and group photograph outside the Capitol, then went inside to the Governor’s Council Room, where they joined administration and state agency leaders. The students then visited legislators’ offices, and later took a guided tour of the Capitol.

“YLF helps delegates understand that the strengths they’ve gained through their disability experiences can be powerful launching points into adulthood,” said Tony Sauer, director of the California Department of Rehabilitation. “Delegates learn that their disabilities aren’t something to be ashamed of, disabilities are something to be proud of...and delegates learn the true meaning of ‘disability pride.’”

“This is a truly unique opportunity to engage California’s youth with disabilities in disability history, culture and disability rights movement,” said Teresa Favuzzi, executive director of the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers. “It is a gathering of an incredibly diverse group of young leaders that ensures hope and progress for all Californians.”

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The annual YLF is coordinated by a partnership of state agencies including EDD; the Department of Rehabilitation; Department of Education; California Workforce Investment Board; California State Council on Developmental Disabilities; State Independent Living Council; California Office on Disability and Health, Department of Public Health; California Health Incentives Improvement Project; and the California Governor's Committee on Employment of People With Disabilities. Private donors included Wells Fargo Foundation; Inland Empire Health Plan; Lockheed Martin Space Systems; Mind Institute, UC Davis Medical Center; California Foundation for Independent Living Centers; Protection and Advocacy; and Friends of Californians with Disabilities.

California created the YLF concept in 1991 and was the first state to hold a YLF conference. Since then more than 33 states and Puerto Rico have followed California's lead. The primary purpose of the Forum is to prepare students with disabilities to reach their career goals, join the workforce, live independently, become involved in their communities, and continue their successes by learning from adults with disabilities who excel in their personal and professional lives. Participants are nominated by teachers and counselors from public and private schools throughout the state.

During the Forum, student delegates negotiated a "Maze of Change" as a disability awareness and team-building exercise and met with alumni of earlier forums to discuss their experiences. The delegates have participated in leadership development programs, attended demonstrations of the latest technology and assistive devices, interactively learned about each other's disabilities, and received presentations and advice from motivational speakers and mentors.

EDITOR'S NOTE: A list of the 53 YLF participants, listed by county of residence, follows:

ALAMEDA COUNTY

<u>Delegate</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>High School</u>
Olivia Davis	Castro Valley	Castro Valley
Alva Gardner	Oakland	Head-Royce
Aisha Khan	Albany	Albany
Audrey Mumper	Livermore	Livermore
Alexandra Slatoff	Piedmont	Piedmont
Tristan Watts	Alameda	Bay Area School of Enterprise

BUTTE COUNTY

<u>Delegate</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>High School</u>
Justin Klein-Edgerton	Oroville	Durham

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

<u>Delegate</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>High School</u>
Sarah Lawton	Lafayette	Jewish Community

DEL NORTE COUNTY

<u>Delegate</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>High School</u>
Dylan Montgomery	Crescent City	Del Norte

(more)

FRESNO COUNTY**Delegate**

Sydney Caldwell
Brandon Daniels
Joshua Harrington
Donald Johnson

City

Fresno
Fresno
Fresno
Fresno

High School

McClane
Roosevelt
Central
Bullard

KERN COUNTY**Delegate**

Sierra Sutherland

City

Taft

High School

Taft Union

LOS ANGELES COUNTY**Delegate**

Alma Altamirano
Lydia Aparicio
Blake Browning
Daisy Hernandez
Xavier Gomez
Jenny Lee
Rebecca Nicholson
Victor Padilla
Destiney Smith

City

Los Angeles
North Hollywood
La Mirada
Los Angeles
Los Angeles
San Marino
Stevenson Ranch
Whittier
Lancaster

High School

Gardena
J.H. Francis Polytechnic
St. John Bosco
Woodrow Wilson
Gardena
San Marino
Hart
La Serna
Lancaster

MENDOCINO COUNTY**Delegate**

Audrey Abell
Allyson Coffman
Kevin Coffman

City

Little River
Willits
Willits

High School

Mendocino
Willits
Willits

ORANGE COUNTY**Delegate**

Kathy Nyugen

City

Westminster

High School

Westminster

PLACER COUNTY**Delegate**

Lorena Murray

City

Granite Bay

High School

Granite Bay

RIVERSIDE COUNTY**Delegate**

Robert Craig
Samantha Vega

City

Mira Loma
Riverside

High School

Jurupa Valley
Summit View

SACRAMENTO COUNTY**Delegate**

Anthony Alfaro

City

Sacramento

High School

Rio Americano

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY**Delegate**

Ashley Paulson
Tim Thompson

City

Crestline
Joshua Tree

High School

Rim of the World
Yucca Valley

(more)

SAN DIEGO COUNTY**Delegate**

Scott Carlson
Alexander Farrell
John Hengesbaugh
Shawn Howell
Jesus Naranjo

City

Oceanside
El Cajon
La Mesa
San Diego
Imperial Beach

High School

Guajome Park Academy
River Valley Charter
Grossmont
Mar Vista
Mar Vista

SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY**Delegate**

Jeremy Hixson

City

Lodi

High School

Tokay

SAN MATEO COUNTY**Delegate**

Sarah Contreras

City

So. San Francisco

High School

South San Francisco

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY**Delegate**

Bryan Moody
Yohan Silva

City

Santa Maria
Santa Maria

High School

Ernest Righetti
Santa Maria

SANTA CLARA COUNTY**Delegate**

Alicia Bena
Jonathan Drennan

City

Palo Alto
San Jose

High School

Gunn
Santa Teresa

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY**Delegate**

Brianne Holeman

City

Felton

High School

Charter Home School

SHASTA COUNTY**Delegate**

Paige Terrazas

City

Whitmore

High School

Foothill

SISKIYOU COUNTY**Delegate**

Kalie Murphy

City

Etna

High School

Etna

SOLANO COUNTY**Delegate**

Eve Billings
Michael Carroll
David Smith
Joseph Wilson

City

Vallejo
Fairfield
Vacaville
Fairfield

High School

Hogan
Fairfield
Vanden
Fairfield

VENTURA COUNTY**Delegate**

Andrea Romero

City

Fillmore

High School

Fillmore

YOLO COUNTY**Delegate**

Tezita Eibensteiner

City

Woodland

High School

n/a

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